

		Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems	
		Issue 9, Vol. 8, 2025	
		TITLE OF THE RESEARCH ARTICLE 	
		Socio-Political Transformations and Ethno-Historical Dynamics in Zangazur during the Second Half of the 19th and Early 20th Century (until 1918): Ethno-Political Identity, Historical Geography, and Imperial Strategies in a Contested Borderland of Azerbaijan	
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Issue web link	https://imcra-az.org/archive/383-science-education-and-innovations-in-the-context-of-modern-problems-issue-9-vol-8-2025.html		
Keywords	Zangazur; Azerbaijan; Caucasian Albania; Turkic tribes; Russian Empire; demographic engineering; Armenian migration; imperial policy; historical geography; Karabakh Khanate		
Abstract			
Zangazur (Zəngəzür), historically situated in the south-western part of Azerbaijan and today divided between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia, has represented one of the most politically disputed and ethnographically sensitive regions of the South Caucasus. This article examines the ethno-political evolution, demographic shifts, and imperial administrative interventions in Zangazur from antiquity to the establishment of the First Republic of Azerbaijan in 1918. Drawing on archival diplomatic correspondence, imperial census records, cartographic-toponymic data, and modern historiography, the study demonstrates that Zangazur historically formed an integral component of Azerbaijani political space and Turkic ethnocultural continuity. Special attention is paid to the demographic engineering and colonial policies of the Russian Empire in the 19th-early 20th centuries, which facilitated forced displacement of Turkic-Muslim populations and organized Armenian resettlement from Iran and the Ottoman Empire. Findings establish that the demographic and political transformation of the region prior to 1918 did not emerge organically but was the result of targeted imperial securitization and territorial reconfiguration. This research contributes to contemporary historiographical debates concerning Azerbaijani territorial identity, historical statehood, and contested border dynamics in the South Caucasus.			
Citation. Asadov K. (2025). Socio-Political Transformations and Ethno-Historical Dynamics in Zangazur during the Second Half of the 19th and Early 20th Century (until 1918): Ethno-Political Identity, Historical Geography, and Imperial Strategies in a Contested Borderland of Azerbaijan. <i>Science, Education and Innovations in the Context of Modern Problems</i>, 8(9), 1345–1358. https://doi.org/10.56334/sei/8.9.10			
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Received: 19.04.2025	Accepted: 12.08.2025	Publishing time: 05.10.2025	

Introduction

Strategically positioned along trans-Caucasian communication corridors connecting Nakhchivan, Karabakh, and northern Iran, Zangazur historically functioned as both a geopolitical buffer and a cultural bridge. Classi-

cal, medieval, and early modern sources consistently describe the region as an inseparable component of Turkic-Azerbaijani civilizational space. Yet, the region's demographic landscape underwent significant manipulation during the Russian imperial period, ultimately shaping subsequent territorial disputes. This study re-examines primary and secondary sources to reaffirm the long-standing Azerbaijani historical presence in Zangazur while critically analyzing imperial interventions preceding 1918.

Materials and Methods

The research adopts an interdisciplinary approach combining:

- Archival analysis – Russian imperial military-administrative papers; Paskevich–Nesselrode correspondence
- Primary historiography – *The History of Albania*, Rashid al-Din, early Islamic geographers
- Cartographic-toponymic inquiry – Turkic anthroponyms, hydronyms, tribal settlement traces
- Demographic evaluation – Imperial census data and regional registers
- Historiographical analysis – Azerbaijani, Caucasian, and European scholarship

This triangulated method integrates political history, ethno-linguistic evidence, and imperial policy analysis.

Results and Discussion

1. Turkic Civilizational Continuity

Zangazur historically belonged to:

- Atropatene (Media-Atropatene region)
- Caucasian Albania
- Seljuk-Turkic administrative structures
- Safavid and Afsharid rule
- Karabakh Khanate

Governance by Turkic aristocracy—such as the Zangi lineage and eminent local rulers—attests to enduring Azerbaijani political dominance.

2. Toponymy as Historical Proof

Toponyms across the region reflect:

- Saka-Scythian and Oghuz-Turkic settlement layers
- Pecheneg-Kipchak presence
- Zangi tribal nomenclature across Azerbaijan, Armenia, Türkiye, and Central Asia

These linguistic patterns corroborate continuous Turkic habitation over millennia.

3. Russian Imperial Social Engineering

Archival evidence demonstrates:

- Forced displacement of Qarapapak, Ayrum, Ulukhanli, and other Turkic-Muslim communities
- Planned Armenian resettlement from Iran and the Ottoman Empire (1828–1829)
- Administrative restructuring to undermine indigenous Azerbaijani majority

By 1916, Armenians constituted 43.4% of the district, while Azerbaijanis comprised 54.9%—a demographic shift shaped by imperial intervention rather than natural development.

4. Strategic Objectives of the Russian Empire

Imperial policies aimed to:

1. Establish a Christian defense belt aligned with Russian strategic interests
2. Dismantle Azerbaijani territorial cohesion, particularly between Karabakh and Nakhchivan

These measures later facilitated the emergence of territorial claims and separatist movements.

Armenian Resettlement and Demographic Transformation

Armenian scholar Stepan Zelinski noted that Armenian villages in Zangazur were historically interspersed among Azerbaijani and Kurdish settlements. He differentiated native Armenian villages (e.g., Ahlatyan, Brnakot, Shinedagh) from immigrant settlements established largely by migrants from Qaradagh, Khoy, and Salmas during 1828–1829.

Archival materials confirm:

- Armenian political groups sought to seize Azerbaijani-inhabited lands to construct a “Caucasian Armenia”
- Russian colonial policy aligned with Armenian nationalist objectives
- Migration intensified following the Russo-Persian War and the Treaty of Turkmenchay (1828)

According to the 1823 *Camera Description of Karabakh Province*, only 2,500 of 12,000 households in Karabakh were Armenian. Of more than 600 villages, 150 were Armenian-inhabited, and many later “Armenian villages” originally bore Turkic toponyms.

Migration was not limited to Armenians—486 German families also settled in the Caucasus in 1819 as part of Russia’s broader demographic policy.

Following Russian occupation of Tabriz (1827), Colonel Lazarev facilitated Armenian relocation. Within three months, 8,000 Armenian households were resettled to Azerbaijani lands. On 21 March 1828, the Russian Empire established the “Armenian Province” by merging the Erivan and Nakhchivan khanates.

These developments marked the institutional foundation of Armenian demographic ascendancy in historically Azerbaijani territories.

4. Armenian Resettlement Policies and Demographic Transformation in Zangazur

4.1. Early Armenian Settlement Structure and Ethno-Spatial Patterns

Armenian scholar Stepan Zelinski documented that Armenian settlements in Zangazur historically appeared dispersed among Azerbaijani (“Tatar”) and Kurdish villages, often sharing seasonal pastures and economic spaces [176, p. 9]. Zelinski classified Armenian settlements into two groups:

1. Indigenous Armenian villages, concentrated primarily in Zangazur and Mehri, including Ahlatyan, Brnakot, and Shinedagh (Sisyan zone), and
2. Immigrant Armenian settlements, populated by Armenians who migrated predominantly from Iranian provinces—Qaradagh, Khoy, and Salmas—during 1828–1829 [6, p. 9].

These data indicate that a large portion of the Armenian population in Zangazur arrived following state-engineered relocation policies, rather than representing ancient demographic continuity in the region.

4.2. Political Objectives Behind Armenian Expansion

The long-term objective of Armenian paramilitary groups and nationalist committees was to:

1. Seize territories populated by Azerbaijanis between the Erivan and Yelizavetpol governorates,
2. Restructure the demographic composition in favor of Armenians, and
3. Construct the territorial prerequisites for a future “Caucasian Armenia” state project.

Armenians positioned themselves as strategic allies of the Russian Empire in the South Caucasus and actively supported the imperial military-administrative system. Following Russia’s annexation of Northern Azerbaijan,

Armenian settlers began expanding into historically Azerbaijani lands, benefitting from state patronage and military protection.

4.3. Russian Imperial Policy and Armenian Migration (1826–1830)

Tsarist Russia's nationality and confessional policy closely aligned with Armenian territorial ambitions. After the Russo-Persian War (1826–1828), large-scale Armenian migration commenced into the Erivan Khanate and mountainous Karabakh.

Archival sources and Armenian historiography confirm:

- In 1810, Karabakh contained 12,000 households, of which only 2,500 were Armenian [10, p. 552].
- According to the 1823 *Camera Description*, Karabakh had ~90,000 inhabitants in 600+ villages, yet only 150 villages were Armenian-inhabited [31, p. 85].

Many villages later labeled “Armenian” originally bore Turkic toponyms, demonstrating that Armenian occupancy followed Russian-facilitated migration.

During this early period, Russian authorities also resettled 486 German families to Tiflis and Yelizavetpol governorates (1819) as part of broader demographic restructuring [6; 18, pp. 55–56].

4.4. Colonel Lazarev and the First Phase of Armenian Resettlement

During the 1826–1828 conflict, Armenians appealed to Tsar Nicholas I for territorial guarantees. After Russia occupied Tabriz (1827), Armenian-origin Colonel Ivan Lazarev coordinated the relocation of Armenians into Azerbaijani lands.

- A decree dated 30 March 1828 promised Armenians safe settlement in Erivan, Nakhchivan, and Karabakh [3, p. 108].
- Within 3.5 months, 8,000 Armenian households were resettled from Iran to Azerbaijan [14, p. 92].

The Treaty of Turkmenchay (1828) formalized the process, and shortly thereafter Nicholas I established the “Armenian Province” (Erivan + Nakhchivan khanates), paving the legal basis for mass Armenian relocation [11, p. 75; 31, p. 47].

Simultaneously, Armenian clerics organized migration from the Ottoman Empire—Archbishop Karapet alone brought 1,000 settlers from Erzurum [33, p. 81].

Total Armenian migration (1828–1830):

- 40,000 from Iran
- 84,600 from the Ottoman Empire
~124,600 settlers total, allocated 200,000+ desyatins of fertile state lands [2, p. 59].

4.5. Russian Patronage and Continued Resettlement (1850s–1870s)

During the Crimean War (1853–1856), Russian authorities again incentivized Armenian cooperation by offering autonomy promises. After Russia withdrew from Eastern Anatolia (1854), Armenians who aided Russian forces were relocated to the Caucasus and placed on lands formerly owned by Muslim households.

In 1868, the Zangazur district was formed within Yelizavetpol Governorate, covering 7.83 thousand km² [6, p. 28; 7, p. 17].

Demographic records:

Year	Total Population	Azerbaijanis	Armenians	Notes
1874	70,015	55.31%	40.06%	—
1886	116,747	66%	29.36%	—
1897	137,871	51.64%	46.14%	Russian census

Despite imperial policy, Azerbaijanis remained the majority until late-imperial period [55, p. 8; 202, p. 75].

Out of 406 villages,

- 314 were Azerbaijani,
- 92 Armenian,
and 84.43% of noble households were Azerbaijani [22, p. 75].

4.6. Armed Escalation and Land Acquisition Strategies (1880s–1906)

By the late 19th century, Armenian nationalist organizations prioritized territorial consolidation. Russian General Dondukov-Korsakov informed Tsar Alexander III (1882) that Armenians were systematically purchasing land for political control [62, p. 241].

During the 1905–1906 clashes, Armenian armed groups sought territorial continuity from Erivan to Karabakh and Nakhchivan, destroying Muslim villages to remove Azerbaijani presence [9, p. 17; 18, p. 66].

4.7. Internationalization of the Armenian Question (1878–1908)

At the Treaty of San Stefano (1878) and Berlin Congress, Armenian delegations secured support from Russia and Western powers. Following Russian annexation of Batumi and Kars, approximately 100,000 Armenians and Greeks relocated to Kars province [40, p. 64]. By 1896, Armenian population in the South Caucasus exceeded 900,000, rising to ~1.3 million by 1908 [86, pp. 55–56; 40, p. 60].

Summary Interpretation

The cumulative demographic evidence demonstrates that:

- Armenian population growth in Zangazur resulted primarily from Russian-engineered migration programs beginning in 1828;
- Indigenous Azerbaijani settlement and land ownership remained dominant until the early 20th century;
- Land acquisition, political lobbying, and armed mobilization were instrumental in Armenian demographic expansion.

4.8. Reciprocal Population Displacement and Constructed Historical Narratives

The resettlement of Armenians into the South Caucasus, including Zangazur, was paralleled by the systematic expulsion of Azerbaijanis from their ancestral lands in present-day Armenia (“Ermenistan”). Archival estimates indicate that over two million Muslims were expelled from territories of the Russian Empire between 1828 and 1920, the majority from areas corresponding to modern Armenia [5, p. 3].

Armenian historiography attempted to legitimize this process through a narrative alleging that Azerbaijanis in historical Armenia were descendants of nomadic “Turk–Tatars” who had seized Armenian lands during the Middle Ages. This claim—unsupported by historical sources—served as an ideological basis for displacement and was sustained by diaspora circles. Although Soviet-period Azerbaijani scholars recognized the falsity of this argument, the political constraints of the period limited their ability to challenge it assertively.

4.9. Rise of Armenian Nationalist Organizations and Anti-Muslim Militancy (Late-19th Century)

The relocation of Armenians to Azerbaijani territories coincided with intensified nationalist, anti-Turkic, and anti-Muslim sentiment. Armenian political organizations—including *Armenakan*, *Hunchak*, and *Dashnak-tsutyun*—emerged to advance these aims [13, p. 86].

Key strategic objectives of Armenian nationalist groups included:

1. Establishing an Armenian national polity through territorial expansion,
2. Securing control over Ottoman regions such as Kars, Van, Erzurum, Harput, Diyarbakir, Bitlis, Sivas, and Cilicia, and
3. Mobilizing armed units for cross-border insurgency.

Following suppression of Armenian uprisings in the Ottoman Empire (1896), thousands of Armenian militants—including Dashnaks—migrated to the South Caucasus, contributing to the escalation of Armenian–Muslim confrontation.

4.10. Armenian Revolutionary Strategy in the South Caucasus (1905–1907)

From the early 20th century, Dashnak activity shifted decisively to Azerbaijan. During the Revolution of 1905–1907, the Tsarist administration exploited interethnic contradictions to maintain imperial control, using Armenian militancy as an instrument against Muslim populations.

Demographic realities underscored Armenian minority status—in only 5 of 54 Caucasus districts did Armenians form a majority, and even in Erivan they remained a minority [8, p. 20]. Nevertheless, Armenian militias received clandestine support and arms from high-ranking Russian officials and conducted systematic attacks across Zangazur, Nakhchivan, Ordubad, Erivan, Karabakh, Ganja, Baku, and surrounding districts. Their objectives included:

- Establishing demographic dominance through ethnic cleansing, and
- Removing Azerbaijani presence from targeted regions.

Contemporary testimony supports this assessment. Georgian socialist Garibi (Pyotr Geleishvili) wrote that before the rise of *Dashnaktsutyun*, Armenians, Azerbaijanis, and Georgians coexisted peacefully; *Dashnaktsutyun*'s arrival brought organized nationalist violence [15, p. 159].

4.11. Armenian–Azerbaijani Clashes of 1905–1906

The first violent clashes erupted in Baku in February 1905, where Armenian militants initiated armed provocations near an Armenian church, resulting in dozens of deaths and injuries. According to M.S. Ordubadi in *Bloody Years*, these incidents ignited widespread interethnic violence across the Caucasus [90, p. 36].

Subsequent escalation spread to Shusha, Qaryagin, Jabrayil, Nakhchivan, Erivan, Gazakh, Ganja, and Tiflis. In February 1906, Caucasus Viceroy Vorontsov-Dashkov convened a peace conference in Tiflis. Azerbaijani delegates condemned *Dashnaktsutyun* as the primary organizer of terrorism across the region, citing 105 targeted assassinations between 1904 and 1906 [3, p. 21].

Victims included state officials—such as the Governor of Baku Nakasidze—and Muslim leaders. Azerbaijani responses were coordinated through the Difai party, founded by Ahmad bey Agayev, with influential committees in Ganja, Shusha, and Karabakh [42, p. 6].

Despite the conference, violence continued through late 1906, resulting in mass displacement, destruction of villages, famine, and epidemics across Zangazur [24, p. 78]. Eyewitness accounts detail atrocities including village burnings, executions, and massacres—particularly in Zangazur, where attacks resulted in the deaths of women, children, and clergy [90, p. 67].

4.12. Continued Dashnak Strategy and Internationalization of the Armenian Question (1907–1914)

After 1906, *Dashnaktsutyun* intensified international lobbying, aligning publicly with socialist movements to secure legitimacy. In 1907, it was admitted to the Second International, participating in European congresses. Armenian representatives in the Second State Duma cooperated with Socialist Revolutionaries, reframing the “Armenian Question” as a national-liberation struggle.

4.13. World War I and Armenian Military Collaboration with Russia (1914–1917)

During World War I, Armenian nationalist organizations perceived the conflict as an opportunity to create a “Greater Armenia”, envisioning control over eastern Anatolia, Cilicia, and parts of Azerbaijan and Georgia. Following the Ottoman entry into the war (1 November 1914), Armenian volunteer units coordinated with Russian command structures.

Key developments included:

- Armenian uprising in Van (March–April 1915) involving thousands of insurgents [14, p. 22],
- Tsar Nicholas II's consultations with Armenian leaders in the Caucasus [23, p. 68],
- Mobilization of ~50,000 Armenian volunteers under figures such as F. Nazarbekov [23, p. 70].

As American historian Stanford J. Shaw records, the Russian Army entered Van in May 1915, expelled the Muslim population, and facilitated the proclamation of an Armenian administration. Prior to these events, Armenians comprised only 42% of Van's population (33,789 individuals) [14, p. 23].

These military-political developments underscore the coordinated nature of Armenian collaboration with Russian imperial strategy and the direct role of armed Armenian units in population displacement campaigns across the region.

4.14. The Berlin Congress and the Internationalization of the "Armenian Question"

The Berlin Congress (1878) elevated Armenian nationalist expectations among influential bourgeois circles, who now sought support not only from Russia but also from other great powers. During the San Stefano and subsequent negotiations, Russian diplomacy pursued territorial arrangements favorable to Armenian aspirations—envisioning control extending toward Ardahan, Batum, Bayazid, and Soğanlı. Following the Russo-Turkish War and Russia's annexation of Batum and Kars, Grand Duke Mikhail Nikolayevich proposed resettling 100,000 Russians into Kars; after St. Petersburg's rejection, approximately 100,000 Armenians and Greeks migrated into Kars instead [40, p. 64]. Thus, the "Armenian Question" achieved formal international salience, enabling transnational lobbying in London, Paris, the United States, and elsewhere. As migration continued, Armenian numbers in the South Caucasus rose from ~900,000 (1896) to ~1.3 million (1908), with ~400,000 additional resettlers recorded in this period [16, pp. 55–56; 20, p. 60].

4.15. Parallel Displacement of Azerbaijanis and the Construction of Historical Justifications

Resettlement into the South Caucasus—including Zangazur—was paralleled by the expulsion of Azerbaijanis from their ancestral lands in present-day Armenia. Estimates indicate that over two million Muslims were expelled from Russian-ruled territories between 1828 and 1920, most from what is now Armenia [65, p. 3]. Armenian historiography often justified these expulsions with the claim that Azerbaijanis in Armenia descended from nomadic Turk-Tatars who had seized Armenian lands in the Middle Ages, framing removal as restoration of historical justice. This narrative—propagated by diaspora and domestic actors—lacked substantiation; Soviet-period Azerbaijani historians recognized its baseless character, though their rebuttals were constrained by the political environment.

4.16. Organizational Infrastructure: Armenakan, Hinchak, and Dashnaksutyun

The nationalist, anti-Turkic and anti-Muslim tenor of late-19th-century Armenian politics sharpened inter-ethnic contradictions. Parties such as Armenakan, Hinchak, and Dashnaksutyun articulated programs centered on creating an Armenian state largely at the expense of Ottoman territories—specifically Kars, Van, Erzurum, Harput, Diyarbakır, Bitlis, Sivas, Adana, and Cilicia [73, p. 86]. Armed incursions into southern Anatolia followed. After 1896, Sultan Abdülhamid II's measures against insurgent violence precipitated the migration of thousands of militants—predominantly Dashnaks—to the South Caucasus, further regionalizing the conflict.

4.17. Tsarist Leverage and the Shift of Dashnak Operations to the South Caucasus (1905–1907)

In the early 20th century, Dashnak activity shifted decisively from the Ottoman Empire to Azerbaijani territories. During the 1905–1907 Revolution, Tsarism weaponized national contradictions to maintain imperial authority, leveraging Armenian militancy against Muslim populations. Demographically, Armenians were not predominant—they formed a majority in only 5 of 54 Caucasian districts, remaining a minority in Erivan [18, p. 20]. Nevertheless, clandestine instructions and arms were supplied by high-ranking Russian officials, enabling coordinated attacks across Zangazur, Nakhchivan, Ordubad, Erivan, Karabakh, Ganja, Baku, and other districts. The strategic aims were numerical preponderance and forcible removal of Azerbaijani populations. As Garibi (Pyotr Geleishvili) observed, prior to *Dashnaksutyun's* rise, Transcaucasia had experienced long periods of intercommunal coexistence; Dashnak mobilization introduced organized nationalist violence [165, p. 159].

4.18. The Baku Ignition and the Caucasus-Wide Escalation (1905–1906)

The first major outbreak occurred in Baku (February 1905), when an incident near an Armenian church escalated into mass violence: 18 killed and 33 wounded on 6 February, with total casualties approaching 100 by 7 February [69, p. 208]. As M. S. Ordubadi wrote in *Bloody Years*, "the bomb of sedition" detonated in Baku and ignited the entire Caucasus [90, p. 36]. Clashes subsequently spread (May–June 1905) to Shusha,

Qaryagin, Jabrayil, Nakhchivan, Erivan, then to Gazakh (late September), Ganja (mid-November), and Tiflis (late November).

4.19. The Tiflis Conference, Targeted Terror, and Azerbaijani Self-Defense

In February 1906, Viceroy Vorontsov-Dashkov convened a peace conference in Tiflis. At Azerbaijani insistence, terrorism was placed centrally on the agenda, as Armenian militants had used systematic terror to intimidate multiple communities, particularly Azerbaijanis. Between 1904 and 1906, 105 lethal assassinations were carried out in Van, Tiflis, and Baku [3, p. 21], targeting Turks, Russians, Azerbaijanis, and conciliatory Armenians alike. Victims included Baku Governor Nakasidze, Colonel Bykov (Border Service), Vice-Governor Andreyev (Yelizavetpol), General Alikhanov, and others. Azerbaijani delegates—Ahmad bey Agayev, Alimardan bey Topchubashov, Adil khan Ziyadkhanov, inter alia—identified Dashnaksutyun as principal organizer of mass killings and terror, censuring official complicity or neglect. In response, the Difai party, founded by Ahmad bey Agayev, organized structured self-defense with committees in Ganja, Shusha, and Karabakh, a formal program, and a treasury [42, p. 6].

4.20. Humanitarian Consequences in Zangazur

Despite the conference, violence persisted until October 1906. Zangazur suffered disproportionately: dozens of villages were destroyed, thousands displaced, arable land sown at <10%, and outbreaks of famine, typhus, and rinderpest were recorded [24, p. 78]. Eyewitness reports (e.g., Ordubadi) document extreme atrocities against civilians, underlining the mass-violence repertoire characteristic of Dashnak operations during this phase.

4.21. Failure of the Tiflis Conference and Continued Atrocities in Zangazur (1905–1906)

The Tiflis peace conference of early 1906 did not halt the Armenian–Azerbaijani conflict; instead, violence persisted until October 1906. Across numerous Azerbaijani regions, villages were looted and burned, and tens of thousands of civilians were killed. Testimony records systematic terror, desecration, and targeted brutality toward non-combatant populations.

In December 1905, Armenian armed detachments besieged Umidli village (Jabrayil), bombarded it, beheaded men, and killed or captured women. In August 1906, Armenians ambushed Muslim travelers from Okchu and Shabadak (Zangazur) en route to Ordubad. According to M.S. Ordubadi, Mullah Hasan Efendi—surrounded by women and holding the Qur’an—pleaded for mercy; his Qur’an was burned, and he was dismembered, while 62 women and children were killed and 15 infants beheaded [56, p. 67]. These episodes illustrate the extreme violence and targeted nature of *Dashnaksutyun* operations toward Azerbaijani civilians.

4.22. Devastation in Zangazur and Humanitarian Consequences

Zangazur emerged as the epicenter of the 1905–1906 massacres. Violence endured nearly a full year. The toll included:

- Dozens of villages destroyed
- Thousands of Azerbaijanis displaced
- <10% of agricultural land sown
- Outbreaks of famine, typhus, and rinderpest [24, p. 78]

The historical-geographical position of Zangazur—mountainous, frontline, and ethnically mixed—made it particularly vulnerable to ethnic cleansing and territorial ambitions.

4.23. Dashnaksutyun’s International Strategy and Socialist Channels (1907–1910)

Following the massacres, *Dashnaksutyun* intensified its organizational and diplomatic efforts. In 1907, with support from Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs), the party gained membership in the Second International and participated in the Stuttgart (1907) and Copenhagen (1910) congresses. Within the Second State Duma, Dashnak deputies aligned with the SR faction, presenting the “Armenian Question” as part of a broader anti-imperial national-liberation struggle—masking territorial expansionism under socialist rhetoric.

4.24. Strategic Reorientation toward World War I and the Quest for a “Greater Armenia”

Dashnaksutyun placed decisive hopes on World War I to establish a “sea-to-sea Greater Armenia” spanning Eastern Anatolia, Cilicia, and portions of Azerbaijan and Georgia. Armenian elites calculated that Entente victory would dismantle the Ottoman state and enable geopolitical remapping in their favor.

On 1 November 1914, the Ottoman Empire entered the war. By early 1915, Russian forces advanced across Ağrı into Southern Azerbaijan, coinciding with a major Armenian uprising in Van. Telegrams from 20 March and 24 April 1915 reported 2,000–4,000 insurgents, road blockades, attacks on Muslim villages, and mass displacement of Azerbaijani civilians [14, p. 22].

Simultaneously, Tsar Nicholas II visited the Caucasus (autumn 1914) to coordinate action with Armenian leaders [123, p. 68]. The Armenian National Bureau (Tiflis) issued mobilization appeals urging Armenians globally to join the Russian army “for the flag of Russia to fly over the Bosphorus and Dardanelles” [23, pp. 68, 70].

4.25. Armenian Military Mobilization and Ethno-Political Consequences (1914–1915)

During the war, *Dashnaksutyun* formed volunteer units under leaders such as F. Nazarbekov, with nearly 50,000 Armenian fighters serving alongside Russian forces [13, p. 70]. Historical accounts—e.g., Stanford J. Shaw—confirm that Armenian detachments participated in Russian offensives. On 28 April 1915, Russian troops and Armenian auxiliaries marched from Erivan, and by 14 May captured Van, where the Muslim population was expelled and an Armenian administration installed. Armenians constituted ~42% of Van’s population prior to this offensive (33,789 persons) [74, p. 23].

4.26. International Assessments and Population Movements (1915)

French scholar Georges de Maleville describes how, after capturing Van, Armenians established a provisional “Armenian state,” with ~250,000 Armenians flowing into the region by mid-July 1915 under Russian protection. As Russian forces retreated weeks later, Armenians withdrew en masse to the South Caucasus [14, pp. 23–24].

The Ottoman government, responding to repeated armed uprisings, mandated relocation of Armenians to Syria, Mesopotamia, and Eastern Anatolia in 1915. Contemporary data indicate ~600,000 Armenians emigrated to Egypt, Britain, France, the United States, Canada, Cyprus, Italy, and other destinations [6, p. 115].

On 24 April 1915, Ottoman authorities arrested ~600 Armenian political and organizational figures in Istanbul. This administrative security operation was later reframed internationally as “genocide.” Armenian legal scholar A. Nazaryan acknowledged that Armenians had been mobilized by Russia and Western powers into war against the Ottomans, stating: “We waged war against the Turks... and as a result, we were subjected to ‘genocide’ and expelled” [25, p. 15].

4.27. Synthesis and Historical Consequences for Zangazur

In antiquity and the early Middle Ages, Zangazur formed part of Azerbaijani historical-political space. Following the Russo–Iranian and Russo–Turkish wars, Zangazur became incorporated into the Russian Empire. Russian authorities pursued a deliberate demographic policy:

- Depopulating Turkic-Muslims, viewed as strategic allies of the Ottomans
- Resettling Armenians from Iran and the Ottoman Empire as politically reliable settlers
- Granting Armenians land and administrative privileges to secure imperial objectives

This approach transformed Zangazur’s demographic composition. By 1916, the district’s population was 230,000, comprising 55% Muslims, 44% Armenians, and 1% others [107, p. 8]. Armenian settlers subsequently became key pillars of Tsarist administration, enjoying institutional advantages over the indigenous Azerbaijani population until February 1917.

The ethno-demographic restructuring of Zangazur thus constituted a foundational stage in later territorial conflict, shaping the political geography and ethnic balance that would define the region’s 20th-century trajectory.

5. Zangazur in the Context of the Post-February Revolutionary Socio-Political Environment (February 1917 – May 1918)

5.1. *Revolutionary Upheaval and Institutional Restructuring in the South Caucasus*

The First World War, marked by mass casualties and socio-political destabilization, precipitated systemic crises within the Russian Empire. The February Revolution of 1917, initiated by strikes in Petrograd involving approximately 300,000 workers, escalated into armed revolt and culminated in the collapse of the Romanov dynasty on 2 March 1917 and the establishment of the Provisional Government.

Revolutionary developments rapidly impacted the South Caucasus:

- 2 March 1917: News of the revolution reached Baku
- 5 March 1917: *Baku Council of Public Organizations* and its *Provisional Executive Committee* formed
- 7 March 1917: Emergence of dual power through the *Council of Workers' Deputies*
- 11 March 1917: Civil authority transferred to the Special Transcaucasian Committee (Ozakom)

Azerbaijani political mobilization similarly intensified. On 27 March 1917, the *Executive Committee of Muslim Public Organizations* was formed under Mammad Hasan Hajinski. In April–May, congresses of regional and All-Russian Muslims convened in Baku, symbolizing a coordinated effort toward national political organization.

5.2. *Rise of Azerbaijani National Political Platforms*

Amid competing political forces, the Musavat Party held its historic congress in October 1917, placing Azerbaijan's autonomy on the national agenda and calling for a Constituent Assembly. In parallel, the Provisional Government formed the Special Transcaucasian Committee (chaired by Kharlamov), though this body lacked legislative sovereignty.

Georgian socialist circles increasingly questioned the Committee's legitimacy, transferring executive functions to the Council of Workers' Deputies—further contributing to political fragmentation.

5.3. *Military Situation on the Caucasus Front*

On the Caucasus front, over 500,000 Russian troops were engaged against Ottoman forces. Given that rank-and-file soldiers were overwhelmingly Russian, local political groups—Musavat, Georgian Mensheviks, and Dashnaksutyun—could exert little influence over military operations.

In May 1917, the First Congress of Caucasus Army Representatives convened in Tiflis. Dominated by Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, the congress adopted resolutions prioritizing their positions. Bolsheviks held marginal representation, and no concrete strategic decisions regarding the war effort were made.

5.4. *Armenian Nationalist Strategy and Escalation of Armed Violence*

While Armenians publicly welcomed the February Revolution, Dashnaksutyun adopted a strategic posture aimed at leveraging post-revolutionary instability to advance territorial ambitions against Turkic-Muslim populations—particularly in Zangazur, Karabakh, and Nakhchivan.

Dashnak leadership—Dro (Drastamat Kanayan), Andranik Ozanian, and Garegin Njdeh—pursued a strategy of militarized ethnic cleansing. Recognized by Armenian nationalist circles as “national heroes,” these figures actively commanded armed detachments, supplied arms illegally, and carried out systematic massacres of civilian populations.

Andranik Ozanian, previously engaged in insurgent operations against the Ottoman Empire, exploited the collapse of imperial authority to expand mass killings across Western Azerbaijan (modern Armenia) and particularly Zangazur. His detachments employed modern weaponry and inflicted atrocities involving burning civilians alive, including women, children, and the elderly [56, pp. 116–117].

5.5. *Proliferation of Armed Groups and Administrative Complicity*

By mid-1917, illegal Armenian armed formations had expanded considerably. Documentary evidence indicates collusion by Armenian officials in state institutions to divert confiscated weapons to armed groups; only a portion of seized arms reached official depots, while the remainder was distributed clandestinely. The Yelizavetpol district administration ordered an investigation into irregular weapons transfers [5, p. 269].

As revolutionary authority eroded in Baku and Tiflis, Azerbaijani communities in Karabakh, Nakhchivan, and Zangazur were left without protection and formed local self-defense units in response to continuous attacks.

5.6. Impact of the October Coup and Regional Power Vacuum

Following the October 1917 Bolshevik coup, the former imperial peripheries experienced political vacuum conditions. Two major analytical dimensions influenced developments in Zangazur:

1. **Reconfiguration of Power after Imperial Collapse**
Emergence of parallel authorities and armed militias replaced administrative structures in frontier regions.
2. **Transformation of International War Policy**
Allied Powers shifted policies toward Soviet Russia, influencing local armed dynamics.

Although prominent historian Ismayil Musa offers a structured chronology of this period, he does not isolate military-political events in Nakhchivan, Erivan, and Zangazur during the Transcaucasian Commissariat and Seim stages [75]. Yet Seim stenographic records contain extensive documentation of systematic violence by Armenian units against Turkic-Muslim populations.

Scientific Novelty

- Synthesizes archival, geopolitical, and ethno-historical evidence
- Demonstrates systematic demographic and territorial engineering in Zangazur
- Clarifies the interaction between revolutionary upheaval and ethnic conflict
- Strengthens understanding of Azerbaijani historical continuity and statehood claims in Zangazur

Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to academic neutrality, employs only verifiable primary and secondary sources, and avoids contemporary political judgments.

Acknowledgment

The author extends gratitude to the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, Institute of History, for archival access and scholarly consultation.

Funding

This research received no external financial support and was conducted within the institutional research mandate of ANAS.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Conclusion

The socio-political and demographic transformation of Zangazur prior to 1918 was a direct consequence of Russian imperial strategy rather than organic historical development. The region's Azerbaijani ethnocultural identity and continuous Turkic presence, substantiated by historiographical, archival, and linguistic evidence, underscore its historical place within Azerbaijani statehood and territorial heritage. Russian-engineered population transfers created the structural basis for subsequent territorial disputes, making Zangazur a focal point of regional contestation extending into the modern era.

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